

Going through the Gospels – Bible Study Series

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Introduction

Who is Jesus Christ? The answer to this question is the most important one of all. Jesus Himself emphasizes the importance of it, as He asks His disciples: “But who do you say I am?” (Mark 8:29). Peter affirms Jesus as the Messiah (the ‘Anointed One’) in the same verse, and this is what the series is about – to be able to (with God’s help) to make the same affirmation and turn to Christ, if you have not done so yet, while there is still time to do so.

So, we are following along the journey with Christ, as recorded in the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), starting with an overview of each of the four. The focus is on investigating every one of the four - from beginning to end - in order to see how God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Bible.

The purpose of this series is to help you understand who Jesus Christ is (that is His identity as ‘God in the Flesh’) and why He came (that is, His mission – to atone for our sins on the cross). Jesus’ resurrection confirms His identity and mission – an event that occurred only once in human history, and will never occur again.

Finally, having understood and embraced that it is only through faith in Christ, that you can receive God’s free gift of salvation (John 3:16-21; Ephesians 2:8-9) it is my prayer for you, to turn to Jesus Christ with a repentant, surrendered, humble and obedient heart and enter an eternal, personal relationship with Him. May this be the starting point for you, whoever you are, to follow Jesus Christ – who is absolute truth (John 14:6, 15:5) and heed our Lord’s command: “Jesus told them, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.” (John 6:29).

Note: We are using the Public domain version of the Berean Standard Bible (BSB) for this Bible study series. It is best if you can use and read along in your own Bible. But, you also have the option of accessing and downloading the BSB Bible for free here: <https://berean.bible/downloads.htm>

What is a Gospel?

What do we mean by 'gospel' and a 'Gospel?' The term 'gospel' comes from the NT Greek *euangelion* ('to evangelize') and originates in the Old Testament (OT) as a specific announcement, namely God's messenger, who declares the arrival of God's kingdom. (1) As such, the author of a 'Gospel' is referred to as an evangelist. This is a person who proclaims the gospel (translated as 'good news') which is God's free gift of salvation to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ. (2)

The four books then (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are referred to as Gospels and record the life and ministry of Jesus. Hereby, they present Christ, His teachings and miracles, from different theological perspectives, targeting distinctive recipients and, thus are written for specific purposes lying behind each individual Gospel. (3)

(1) T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester: IVP Academic, 2000), 521.

(2) Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 150.

(3) Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 150-151.

Gospel Overviews

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Overview & Distinctives (1) (2) (3)

Overview of Matthew

Author: Matthew (Levi)

Date Written: Around A.D. 60 to 65, possibly from the city of Antioch

Content: With the birth of Jesus of Nazareth; God initiates a new kingdom on earth, which is the kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew's Gospel reveals the kingdom of Heaven as a major theme and thereby pays close attention to Jesus' teachings and actions. Matthew also shows how Old Testament passages reveal the fulfillment of the above theme through the Messiah, which can be seen in his careful record of Jesus' ancestors to disclose the royal lineage.

Key events in this Gospel include the virgin birth of Jesus, Jesus' Messianic baptism, Jesus' wilderness temptation by the devil followed by His early ministry activity.

How to live life in the kingdom of Heaven on earth, is found in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount with the *Beatitudes*.

To further reveal the kingdom of Heaven, Jesus performs miracles and also teaches in parables (stories). Matthew makes it clear that this kingdom includes both Jews and Gentiles.

The Gospel finishes with Jesus' death and resurrection, along with His command of making disciples from every nation - The Great Commission.

Readers: A Jewish-Christian community.

Purpose: To call the Jewish people to repent and obey Jesus as their promised Messiah.

Theme: Jesus Christ is Israel's Messiah, the King of the Jews.

Structure: Five parts, each containing six long sections of Jesus' ministry form the basis of the book (chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25).

Style: Matthew is written in as concise orderly narrative, along with some discourse sections. An emphasis on OT prophecies fulfilled in Jesus, point to Christ as the promised Messiah and "King of the Jews."

Key Verse: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1).

Summary: In Matthew, Jesus is the Son of David (Isaiah 11:1; Matthew 1:1).
Overview of Mark

Author: John Mark

Date Written: Possibly between A.D. 55 and 65 from Rome.

Content: Mark's Gospel emphasizes the servanthood of Jesus Christ. While not one of the twelve disciples, it is possible that Mark – as non-eyewitness – bases his account on the sermons of the apostle Peter. It is a fast-paced record, since Mark emphasizes the steady movement of Christ. Beginning the Gospel with John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism, we learn about many particulars of Jesus' ministry: healing the sick, driving out demons, feeding masses of people and ceaselessly helping those in need. Mark emphasizes Christ's compassion to those on the fringe of society, as well as placing emphasis on the Lord's actions rather than His teachings. Mark establishes that Jesus is the Son of God, as a result of the many miracles He performs. Yet, all of this points to Christ's servanthood – a main theme in this Gospel: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45). Mark's Gospel concludes with Jesus' death and resurrection, providing a straightforward outline of the life of Jesus Christ.

Readers: Roman Christians not familiar with Jewish religion (Mark explains Jewish customs to his readers).

Purpose: To familiarize and educate new believers in the Christian faith.

Theme: Jesus is characterized as God's servant. At the same time, Jesus' authority reveals that He is the Christ, the Son of God (1:1; 8:29; 15:39).

Structure: Mark arranges the events of Jesus' ministry primarily in topical instead of chronological order.

Style: Mark's Gospel is one of action, rather than Jesus' teachings. The events occur 'immediately' – one of Mark's favorite expressions – and he records twenty miracle accounts, the most to be found in all four Gospels. In contrast, there are only two discourses, namely kingdom parables (4:1-33) and an end-time discussion (13:1-37).

Key Verse: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1).

Summary: In Mark, Jesus is the Son of Man (Zechariah 3:8; Mark 8:36).

Overview of Luke

Author: Luke, a Gentile physician, and companion of the apostle Paul.

Date Written: ca. A.D. 60

Content: The Gospel of Luke is based on different eyewitness accounts to Jesus Christ. Since Luke was not an eyewitness to these events – but to many of the events in the book of Acts, which he also wrote – he prepares a highly detailed account of Jesus' life. Luke is writing for a man called Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4) providing a universal perspective of Jesus' life and ministry. Luke emphasizes Jesus' interest for outcasts and marginalized people, including women and the poor. The gospel also focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit. Given his disposition towards details, Luke provides specific dates for the events in this account. Also, this is the only gospel that records the activity prior to Jesus' conception along with His birth and early childhood years. The outline of Jesus' ministry is similar to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Luke adds an elaborate travel narrative of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:41). The Gospel closes with Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension with Christ's command to the disciples to wait for the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49).

Readers: Greek-oriented Christians

Purpose: To help a Greek Christian, Theophilus, and others to grow in their faith walk with Jesus.

Theme: We can trust in Jesus Christ, because God Himself has come as 'God in the Flesh,' as Messiah, offering salvation to all who believe in Him.

Structure: While some clear divisions exist (1:5; 3:1; 9:51) it is challenging, if not arbitrary to establish a structure. Chapters 1 and 2 can be seen as introduction, 3:1-4:13 linking the ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist. Thereafter, a threefold partition is possible: One, Jesus teaches and heals in Galilee (4:14-9:50). Two, Jesus' "travel narrative" takes place (9:51-19:45). Three, Jesus is rejected by the Jewish authorities and crucified, followed by the longest resurrection account of all four Gospels (19:45-24:53).

Style: The longest of all Gospels, Luke blends together Jesus' teaching, miracles, along with more parables than in any other gospel. It is the most

detailed nativity narrative and there is a break, culminating in Jesus' resolute journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (9:52-19:44).

Key Verse: "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which are most surely believed among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account." (Luke 1:1-3).

Summary: In Luke, He is the Son of Adam. (Zechariah 6:12; Luke 3:38)

Note: Luke is also the author of Book of Acts. Here he continues the beginning of the early Christian church, the work of the Holy Spirit and God bringing the gospel into all the world. Acts is the second part of Luke's writing and Luke-Acts can be seen as a simple complete work.

Overview of John

Author: The apostle John, son of Zebedee

Date Written: probably around A.D. 90 from the city of Ephesus

Content: In contrast to the other gospels, which primarily emphasize a theological purpose, only John plainly state his purpose:

“But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.” (John 20:31)

With this specific aim, John’s Gospel provides a text, unlike the other three accounts. John is interested in what Jesus’ actions say and reveal about Him; thereby referring to Christ’s miracles as “signs.” He organises his gospel around these “signs,” which include Jesus’ seven “I am” statement, He reveals about Himself.

The Gospel begins with the pre-existent Christ, “the Word,” that is the unique Son of God – who takes on human flesh, in order to reveal God the Father to mankind. Following the testimony of John the Baptist, John recounts Jesus’ baptism. Thereafter, this Gospel rearranges some events and also adds different material. As such John, records several trips of Jesus to Jerusalem, distinguishing his account from the other Gospels. John renders Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples at length, followed by recording Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. John’s Gospel concludes with encounters between Jesus Christ and his disciples.

Readers: Jewish readers outside the Holy Land and Jewish proselytes.

Purpose: To bring people everywhere to faith in Jesus Christ.

Theme: Eternal, everlasting life is available now (5:24-26) to all who come to know God – the Father – through Jesus Christ – who is eternal life (17:3).

Structure: John arranges his gospel centered around seven signs (miracles) of Jesus. About half of the Gospel records the final week of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Style: Composed in simple Greek, using a limited vocabulary, the emphasis is on Jesus' "I am" sayings, pointing to His divinity.

Key Verse: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30, 31).

Summary: In John, Jesus is the Son of God (Isaiah 4:2; 7:14; John 3:16).

Note: John does not record the casting out of demons, nor the transfiguration event, and there are no parables. Instead, John emphasizes Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit (14:16-18; 26; 15:26; 16:7-14; 20:22), which is then fulfilled - following Christ's ascension in Acts 2.

(1) Adapted from NLT, Tyndale House, p.1513. ok. *Holy Bible NLT*. 2nd Ed. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007, p.1513, 1572, 1610, 1672.

(2) Adapted from Don Stewart, "Why are there four Gospels," accessed, March 21, 2024,
https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_188.cfm.

(3) Adapted from Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1811-1813.

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<https://biblebasedchristcentered.wordpress.com>

May God bless you and keep you.

Pastor John

Amen.

